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## **Regionalist Party Mobilisation on Immigration<sup>1</sup>**

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### **Abstract**

*This article explores the various ways in which regionalist parties approach the issue of immigration. Drawing on several cases, it compares how regionalist parties 'construct' the territory and how issues of diversity and immigration inform their policy goals. It is shown that mobilisation on immigration varies across regions. Whilst parties in Scotland and Catalonia have encouraged immigration as a way of expanding national membership and bolstering the labour market, those in Bavaria and Northern Italy have viewed immigration as a threat to their culture and economy. This article identifies factors influencing party immigration policies, including party ideology, local party competition, central government policy and other statewide influences. It also assesses the extent to which European integration has influenced parties' territorial projects, in particular whether parties have responded to pressures to adopt EU norms and common principles, such as diversity and multiculturalism, in order to be perceived as credible.*

Immigration has become one of the most divisive issues in West European politics. Despite the arguments of demographic experts that immigration is the only way to mitigate Europe's pending demographic (and economic) crisis caused by falling birth-rates and an ageing population (Bonin et al 2000; Morgan 2003), many parties are fearful that increasing diversity will result in social conflict, weaken traditional cultures and threaten national identities. Nowhere is this debate more focused than in the discourse of substate regionalist parties, which have sought to valorise their cultures and identities in the face of increasing globalisation and European integration (Keating &

McGarry 2001; McGarry & Keating 2006). As a party family whose 'core business' is the issue of territorial autonomy (De Winter *et al* 2006), regionalist parties are primarily concerned with the defence of regional identity, language and cultures, the preservation of social values and distinct ways of life, and the advancement of territorial economic interests (De Winter & Türsan 1998). As such, the issue of immigration, which poses distinct challenges as well as opportunities for the preservation and advancement of regional identity, is a fundamental concern to regionalist parties.

The aim of this article is to explore how regionalist parties have approached the issue of immigration. It considers the extent to which parties have responded to European pressures to de-ethnicise their nation-building projects in order to be perceived as legitimate. Drawing on the experience of regional mobilisation in Italy (the Northern League), the UK (Scottish National Party), Spain (the Catalan Convergence and Union Party) and Germany (the Bavarian Christian Social Union), this article compares how regionalist parties incorporate themes of diversity and multiculturalism into their 'images' of the nation, and how these themes inform their immigration goals. The first section offers an overview of regionalist party mobilisation in Europe, exploring their territorial projects and their adaptation to processes of European integration. The central section unpacks the party constructions of the territory in the four cases, and examines how these are linked to parties' immigration policies. The final part seeks to uncover the different motivations for pursuing a pro- or anti-immigration approach, and identifies several sources of variation.

But before commencing with this analysis it is necessary to say a word on terminology. This article identifies regionalist parties as the key actors in territorial mobilisation. Yet such parties have also been referred to as minority nationalist, ethno-nationalist, autonomist or ethno-regionalist (De Winter & Türsan 1998; De Winter *et al* 2006). Although there is a general consensus that the defining characteristic of these parties is their claim to autonomy, there has been considerable disagreement regarding the appropriate terminology with which to describe these parties (see Hepburn 2009). This is in part due to the tendency of territorial politics sub-disciplines to talk past each other. Thus, 'regionalist' parties tend to be separated from 'minority nationalist' parties based

on their self-determination goals – whereby nationalist parties are often (mistakenly) understood as independence-seeking parties that base their claims to nationhood on historical, cultural and linguistic factors whilst regionalist parties tend to be seen as having more functional demands for greater powers from the state. This article rejects this analytical separation and instead proposes to examine those parties that seek to represent and advance the interests and identity of a given substate territory, which may or may not be defined as a nation or region. Territorial interests are not only concerned with 'nationhood', identity and self-determination in the symbolic or constitutional sense, but also with socioeconomic demands such as addressing regional economic disparities and demographic matters concerning the labour market (Hepburn 2009).

### **Regionalist Parties in Europe**

A number of studies have demonstrated how regionalist parties have reoriented their autonomy goals to include the European level (Lynch 1996; Keating 2001; McGarry & Keating 2006; Hepburn 2006; Elias 2008a). Regionalist parties are now able, indeed obligated, to frame their interests and demands at levels of authority beneath and beyond the state. The assumption that these parties universally seek secession and statehood is therefore misplaced. With the clear exception of the independence-seeking Scottish National Party, most parties have long pursued less radical forms of constitutional change. In particular, regionalist parties in Europe have interpreted self-determination to mean different degrees of autonomy, which includes a place within a Europe of the Regions or Peoples (Keating 2001; Elias 2008b; Hepburn 2008a). European integration offers these parties a number of opportunities for political engagement, such as networking and lobbying opportunities, and participation in transnational groups such as the European Free Alliance (De Winter and Gómez-Reino 2002). Whereas it could be argued that autonomy goals once focused exclusively on state structures, parties now lobby at the European level to advance their territorial projects (Lynch 1996; Keating 2001, 2006).

Regionalist parties, associated with the phenomenon of 'stateless' nationalism, have been perceived as parochial and backward, with tendencies toward a 'closed' vision of a politically and culturally homogenous nation. For instance, Lipset (1985) believed that peripheral nationalism was a 'revolt against modernity' whilst Hobsbawm (1990) argued that nationalist movements were throwbacks to the past, based on pre-modern and closed visions of society. Yet there has been growing recognition of the virtues of nationality and regionalism. Scholars, such as Miller (1995), Guibernau (2002) and Keating (2006) maintain that such movements can be equally forward-looking and progressive, seeking new forms of collective organisation amid the rescaling of political authority brought about by supranational integration. Instead of seeking to banish the 'other', parties have often exhibited self-consciously liberal and democratic forms of territorial mobilisation, for instance arguing for recognition of the diversity of 'peoples' in the EU.

It has been argued that deepening political integration has caused regionalist parties to 'internationalise' their appeals and demands (Keating 1995; Lynch 1996; Jolly 2007). This has occurred for both ideological and practical reasons. On one hand, parties must play the European ideological 'game' to be perceived as credible, thus emphasising themes intrinsic to the shared value framework of Europe such as democracy, diversity and human rights. On the other, parties have welcomed Europe into their projects in order to receive structural funds, to access decision-making at the European level and to participate in Europe-wide political lobbying associations. The next part of this discussion considers whether, as argued by Keating (2006), European integration has led to a 'de-ethnicisation' of regionalist parties and an increased emphasis on territory as the criterion of inclusion in the territorial community. Keating's assertion forces a re-evaluation of the assumption that the regionalist 'party family' is a single homogenous group. Instead it is necessary account for variation in forms of territorial mobilisation, allowing for strategic party responses to changing political circumstances, and the possibility that parties may exhibit different cultural, economic and political markers at different times.

## **Party Constructions of the Territory**

Regionalist parties in Scotland, Bavaria, Catalonia and Northern Italy have articulated distinct immigration strategies as part of their territorial projects. They have sought to sustain the territory as a key unit of shared identity and have constructed or re-appropriated cultural meanings of the territory – be it referred to a nation, region, people or *Heimat* – in line with their socioeconomic and immigration goals. The following section examines how the Scottish National Party (SNP), Catalan Convergence and Union Party (CiU), Italian Northern League (LN) and Bavarian Christian Social Union (CSU) 'construct' the territories that they claim to represent. The focus is on the way in which parties use cultural, economic or territorial markers of membership of the nation, and how this is linked to their main political and socioeconomic goals.

### *Scottish National Party*

The Scottish National Party was formed in 1934, and remains to this day the leading regionalist party in Scotland. The party's main goal is independence, to be achieved within a European construct. Since 1990 the SNP has articulated a social-democratic policy platform, though the party also contains centre-right elements (Lynch 2002, 2009). With devolution, the SNP became the official opposition in the Scottish Parliament in 1999, and in May 2007 it formed a minority Scottish government – the first with the explicit aim of breaking up the UK (Hepburn 2008c).

For the SNP, the Scottish nation constitutes a political community that requires sovereign statehood in order to make it a 'normal nation' (Salmond 2008). Scotland, it is argued, is a country rich in natural resources and a skilled population that could easily overturn its sluggish economic growth with independence (SNP 2003). Scholars have highlighted the overtly 'civic' character of the SNP. For instance, Hamilton (1999, 2007) argued that Scottish political nationalism was a model of associative identity-politics in Europe, whilst Nairn (2000) believed that the SNP had recaptured the democratic voice of Scotland. The nation is characterised territorially, and thus anyone can consider herself to form that nation by living in it and sharing in its institutions and

society. This inclusiveness means that the 'tariff' for being a nationalist is quite low, and allows the SNP to appeal to the widest voting electorate. The 'nation' includes non-native born or blood-descent Scots, which is underlined by the SNP's affiliated organisations, Asian Scots for Independence and New Scots for Independence. The party has maintained that '[t]he presence in Scotland of people from diverse origins is a source of enrichment for Scottish society' (SNP 1992: 13). The SNP's understanding of 'national belonging' as voluntary participation in a multicultural society also deflects criticism that the party is exclusionary or anti-English (Leith 2008). The party is mindful that any emphasis on birth or tradition will arouse accusations of narrow 'ethnic' nationalism, which would discredit the movement and undermine its appeal to broad sections of Scottish society.

#### *Bavarian Christian Social Union*

The Christian Social Union has governed Bavaria near continuously since 1946 and claims to be the party of the Bavarian people, defender of federalism and guardian of the *Heimat* (Mintzel 1978; Roth 1994; Waigel 1995; Jesse 1996). The term *Heimat* implies a sense of belonging to the land, culture and traditions and has been made equivalent to 'nation' in some analyses (Sutherland 2001; Hepburn 2008b). In contrast to the SNP, the CSU has continuously constructed the Bavarian nation an 'imagined community' with strong emotional and symbolic content. Its understanding of the Bavarian nation derives, firstly, from an historical myth of statehood and shared culture and traditions that sits alongside, but ultimately supersedes, the identity and traditions of Bavaria's diverse regions (Mintzel 1992; James 1995; Ford 2007). The CSU's construction of Bavaria is also based upon the post-war modernisation of the Land, with the CSU at the helm (Kleinhenz 1995; Mintzel 1999). This vision of 'modern' Bavaria brimming with high-tech industries is complemented by safeguarding traditional economic communities, such as craftsmen and farmers, which are associated with Bavaria's history, culture and social values. Finally, to forge a sense of common purpose and belonging, the CSU has sought to overcome divisions between Protestant and

Catholic communities by developing cultural policies that assert Bavaria's unique identity, such as holding traditional festivals and cultural events (Sutherland 2000). The CSU does not, however, support the development of a 'multicultural' Bavaria. In 1989, CSU Leader Edmund Stoiber said that 'talk of a multicultural society tears up the very roots of our national and cultural identity, developed over centuries' (cited in Roth 1995: 324). Instead, the party seeks to preserve and protect the Bavarian *Heimat* from foreign cultures, especially those outside the EU.

### *Catalan Convergence and Union Party*

The Convergence and Union Party (CiU) is a federation of conservative, liberal and Christian Democratic parties in Catalonia. It won the first Catalan regional elections in 1980, and was the regional party of government until 2003 when it was narrowly defeated by a left-wing coalition. In the aftermath of the Franco regime, Jordi Pujol's party sought to rebuild the Catalan nation around a common identity, based on a shared history, culture and language, and mobilised towards the goal of economic progress (Keating 2006). In its struggles with the Spanish state to obtain more autonomy, it has insisted on the *hecho diferencial*, or specificity, of the Catalan nation. The CiU constructs the nation in line with its own ideological beliefs, emphasising tradition and the Catholic social doctrine. Yet the CiU also views the Catalan nation as adaptable to modern conditions and highly democratic. To that end, the CiU has strenuously promoted a 'civic' nation-building project (Guibernau 2006). Pujol's assertion that 'everyone who lives and works in Catalonia and has a wish to be so and feels tied to this land, is Catalan' has become official party, as well as government, policy (Pujol 1976; Keating 1996). Therefore, for the CiU membership of the Catalan nation is based on territorial and linguistic markers, rather than race or descent (Conversi 1997).

### *The Northern League*

The Northern League (LN) was created in 1991 as a confederation of regionalist 'leagues' that evolved into a single centralised party. Described variously as a regionalist, populist, anti-migrant,



and/or radical right party (Biorcio 1991; Betz 1994; Gomez-Reino 2002; McDonnell 2006; Zaslove 2006), the Lega has altered its constitutional to encompass federalism, secession and devolution. The latter goal has been pursued as part of Berlusconi's centre-right Pole of Liberty governments. The Lega's greatest challenge has been to create an imagined community of 'Padania', loosely based on the geographical boundaries of Northern Italy, that has no historical basis (Biorcio 1997; Gomez-Reino 2002). Faced with these difficulties, the LN has sought to invent a historical and cultural narrative for Padania, for instance referring to the glorious battles of its Celtic predecessors (McDonnell 2006). Padania is proclaimed as a linguistic, ethnic, territorial and importantly, and economic community. The Lega presented itself as the party of the northern industrial periphery, linking the cultural values of small-scale industry in the North-East communities with the concept of a Lombard (later, Northern) people (Biorcio 1991: 53; Cento Bull & Gilbert 2001). The Lega sought to build the nation around the 'traditional' ways of life in Northern Italy, Catholic values, and a work ethic described as 'neo-Calvinist'. Blood and family ties are also important markers of belonging for the Lega, indicated by the party's support for the return of Italian descendants from South America, who have common cultural and religious roots (McDonnell 2006).

### **Party Responses to Changing Demographics**

There are few issues that have aroused the panic of the West European electorate than the prospect of rapid demographic and consequent social change, resulting from an aging population, falling birth rates, the increased mobility of workers and growing asylum and immigration. A recent survey on public attitudes towards migration and European integration in six EU member states revealed that a significant share of citizens is apprehensive about immigration (Diamanti and Bordinon 2005). The study found that the degree of public concern generated by immigrants is highest in Italy and Germany, whereby 35-40% of respondents believed that immigrants posed a threat to employment, public order and safety (ibid: 5-6). This research corroborates a number of studies highlighting the potentially destabilizing effects of immigration on the politics and society of host

states (see Messina 2002). Immigration-related issues have risen to the top of the public policy agenda of the EU and its member states (Messina and Thouez 2002), resulting in a widespread tightening of irregular and illegal controls (Coleman 2002: 47). In response to such concerns, many countries have seen the emergence of grassroots anti-immigrant protests (Della Porta 1996; Gomez-Reino 2002: 132), and the rise of radical right anti-immigrant parties that have received over 10% of the vote in nine European states (Zaslove 2004: 99; Mudde 2007). Such parties have linked immigration to crime, public disorder, the demise of traditional cultures, unemployment and an overburdened welfare state. Other political parties, meanwhile, have had to tread very carefully around these issues, not least due to uncertainty about how to compete with radical right parties. As a consequence, there are few parties in Europe that are not divided on immigration policy (Lahav 2004: 15). As Zaslove (2006) argues, immigration is a cross-cleavage issue in left-right terms, posing challenges for traditional parties as well as 'new politics' movements.

Although immigration is generally reserved to the central government, it also affects a number of devolved policy areas including economic development, infrastructure, healthcare, and housing, causing some regional actors to call for greater control over immigration. Most vociferously, regionalist parties have argued that devolving immigration policy to the regions, which is currently practiced in countries such as Australia and Canada (Quebec), allows regional actors to better integrate welfare and development policies (Wright 2006). It also, arguably, allows regions to emphasise their claims to nationhood or 'distinct society' by setting their own terms for territorial membership and immigrant integration (Delgado 1998; Zapata Barrero 2007). The following section explores how regionalist parties have responded to the immigration debate in each of the four regions.

### *Scotland*

Net migration in the UK has increased dramatically under the New Labour government since the late 1990s (Davis 2009). From 1998, net immigration to the UK surged by over 100,000 per annum

(Hatton 2005). This has been the result of a highly controlled immigration strategy, which has focused on the active recruitment of highly skilled economic migrants vis-à-vis the expansion of the work permit system and the creation of a points-based migration system (Somerville 2007). Increased economic migration has gone hand-in-hand with more astringent asylum requirements, achieved through the tightening of regulations in four separate bills since 1999. Government policy has been characterised as favouring business interests in immigration policy whilst ostracizing others (Davis 2009). The English media response to increased (economic) migration has been a mixture of fear and panic, with immigrants being perceived as a drain on the welfare state and difficult to integrate, particularly in the heavily populated South-east. Bailey (2008) argued that the media's reaction to immigrants and asylum seekers has been to define and name them as the 'Other' in a dichotomy of 'us versus them'. The situation in Scotland, however, has been quite different. In 'demand' terms, Scotland has long faced a decline in population, caused by emigration and falling birth rates. In 'supply' terms, Scotland received fewer immigrants per head than other parts of the UK (Wright 2007). As a result of these differences, public attitudes towards immigration to Scotland, in addition to immigrants' identification with their host country, have diverged from England (Saeed *et al* 1999; Bond 2006). Parties have overwhelmingly welcomed, rather than feared, immigration as a means of resolving Scotland's distinct demographic challenges.

As previously stated, the SNP has asserted a 'civic' kind of nationalism, whereby its criteria for national membership is based on territory rather than blood or descent. The SNP advocates opening up Scotland's doors to further immigration to attract vital skilled workers, and has proposed a devolved immigration policy for Scotland to achieve this goal (SNP 2007a). The party supports this policy on economic grounds whilst at the same time advocating principles of diversity and freedom. The SNP wishes to increase immigration so that Scotland has a 'stable population' and immigrant families can contribute to high-quality public services for future generations. As SNP Justice Minister Kenny MacAskill argued, 'Our economic needs and social wants are different and distinct to the rest of the UK. As a nation of emigrants we wish to see immigrants coming to

Scotland dealt with kindness and compassion, not brutality and oppression' (*Holyrood*, 29 October 2006). MacAskill was referring to the contentious treatment of asylum seekers in Scotland, an issue reserved to Westminster. With regards to economic immigration, the SNP sought to extend the Scottish Lib-Lab government's 'Fresh Talent' initiative, which arranged for overseas students to be granted a two-year visa extension (Scottish Executive 2004). The SNP argued that Scotland required immigration to fill lower-skilled positions, and has advocated the introduction of a 'green card' and a devolved immigration policy that allowed Holyrood ministers to set a population target, based on a points system that took into consideration skills, age and education (*The Sunday Herald*, 20 February 2005; SNP 2007b: 22). The SNP's main argument for attracting more people to live and work in Scotland was to boost the labour market and to encourage the development of a multicultural Scotland free from racism and intolerance (SNP 2005; Leith 2008).

### *Bavaria*

Germany's citizenship and immigration laws have long been the source of contention. Until 1998, immigration was based on the principle of *jus sanguinis* (by blood) whereby ethnic Germans born abroad were granted citizenship, whilst residents not of German descent were considered foreigners (Grieco 2002). This policy was created in response to expulsion of 12 million ethnic Germans to Central and Eastern Europe following the Second World War (Rock and Wolff 2002). However, a change in the law was required to account for the rise in temporary and guest workers that were employed to meet economic demand caused by falling birth rates, and later in response to EU enlargement. In 1998 a new citizenship and immigration law based on principle of *jus soli* (by birth) was introduced by the new SPD-Green federal government. This law was vigorously challenged by the CDU-CSU opposition, which succeeded in watering down some elements (Zaslove 2006). Despite this, Germany has seen a dramatic rise in asylum and immigration, and this has become a central focus of debate in federal and Land politics.

It has been argued that 'CSU leaders and Bavarians in general tended to be particularly nationalistic and unsympathetic to foreigners and immigration' (Hoadley 2003: 5). The CSU has advocated a drastic reduction in the number of immigrants and asylum seekers that Germany accepts. In 1998, Bavaria demanded an opt-out from EU immigration rules, in order that the CSU-led government could require proof from immigrants that they had a job and health insurance in Bavaria. In the federal election that year the CSU also criticised Gerhard Schröder for pledging to work in the interest of Germans *and* people living in Germany; it did not believe that the government should work on behalf of 'non-citizens'. The CSU even sought to insert the phrase 'Germany is not an immigration country' into the CDU-CSU electoral manifesto, but was deflected from doing so (Hoadley 2003). In 2000 the Bavarian government introduced a restrictive 'Blue Card' that tied the granting of a residence permit to a particular employment contract. And in 2002 the CSU launched a petition that collected 5 million signatures that opposed the immigration law put forward by the SPD-Greens federal government, which laid out a number of measures designed to encourage foreigners to integrate into German society (Green 2000). CSU leader Edmund Stoiber argued that immigration could not be increased whilst unemployment in Germany was so high, as it placed too great a strain on public services (BBC, 22 March 2002). The CSU has also made a cultural argument against immigration. In its construction of national identity, the CSU ascribes a religious meaning to Bavaria as a Christian state (Ford 2007: 293). As a result, the CSU has argued against Turkish membership of the European Union, as extreme religious diversity threatens the Christian roots and societal structures of 'Europe'.<sup>2</sup> Within Bavaria, the CSU advocates a reduction in future immigrants, which are considered a threat to Bavaria's culture, and assimilation of those who gain entry. Sutherland (2000: 206) argues that the party's position on immigration policy indicates that 'the CSU's understanding of national loyalty is of a deep-rooted, quasi-religious feeling of belonging, rather than the mere exercise of citizenship rights'.

Spain has amongst the lowest birth rates and highest immigration rates in the European Union. The relative weight of foreigners in Spain's total population rose from 1% (350,000) in 1991 to 10% (1.5 million) in 2007, making it one of the largest receivers of immigrants in the world (Instituto Nacional de Estadística 2007). Whilst the central government has had an open immigration policy since the mid-1980s, it has also sought to reduce illegal immigration from North Africa, which is relatively high due to Spain's geographical position. The main political parties in Spain – the PSE and the PP – have pursued different strategies of achieving this. In 2001 the Partido Popular government introduced legislation that made it easier to expel illegal immigrants, whilst reducing their rights of association, protest and strike (BBC, 23 January 2001). In 2004, the Socialist government amended the law by legalising the situation of immigrants that were illegally employed and granting them a legal wage, benefits and an employee contract, in an alternative method of reducing illegal employment (Euroresidentes, 29 August 2004).

Large-scale immigration to Catalonia to some extent preceded that to Spain as a whole. As one of the wealthiest regions in Spain, Catalonia has had an open immigration policy since its economic expansion in the 1960s, attracting at first Southern Spanish immigrants – mainly from Andalucia – and later from North Africa and South America (Maluquer 1998). The large proportion of migrants living in Catalonia – which has hovered between 30-40% of the population since the 1960s (Keating 1996: 166) – has prompted some to dub Catalonia a 'county of immigrants'. Catalonia's history of immigrant absorption has had significant effects on Catalan's social structure as well as the definition of Catalan identity (Guibernau 2002). But rather than perceiving immigrants as a threat to Catalan culture, immigration is perceived as beneficial to the economy and the nation (Pujol 1976; Delgado 1998). In 2001, the CiU-led Catalan government drafted an immigration policy that went 'against the grain of standard migration policy and differs greatly from the Immigration Law approved by the Spanish parliament' due to its flexibility, openness, and emphasis on social rights and citizenship (Sedura i Mas 2001).

The CiU has forged an inclusive 'civic' Catalan identity, where language is marker of identity, but has also been used as a tool for assimilation (Conversi 1997). Linguistic normalization, which compels immigrants to become 'culturally Catalan', is central to the CiU's project of nation-building in Catalonia (Keating 1996). A number of laws have established Catalan as the language of public administration, the media and education (Castiñeira 2007). Yet instead of alienating newcomers, this policy is supported by immigrants and Southern Spanish settlers in Catalonia, as much as native-born Catalans (CIS 1994). These strong integrative goals have enabled successive CiU governments to quell any tendencies towards racism or xenophobia as evidenced in other regions of Spain (Conversi 1997; Delgado 1998). Immigrants are offered free Catalan language immersion courses (the alternative is for them to pay for Spanish lessons) and in 2003 the government launched a campaign to encourage immigrants to speak Catalan. This goal is hastened by the relative ease of learning Catalan by Castilian-speakers from within Spain and immigrants from without, compared for instance to learning Euskara in the Basque Country (Conversi 1997: 187). As a consequence, the ability to speak Catalan is seen as a 'badge of achieved status' (Keating 1997) rather than a marker of ethnic exclusion. The policy is to assimilate immigrants into the Catalan community so that the nation remains culturally distinct from the rest of Spain. Although the CiU does not go as far as welcoming the creation of a multicultural society, it does articulate the benefits of integrating newcomers in Catalonia, which helps strengthen their identity and the (scale of) demands for autonomy, whilst enabling incomers to share the common culture of Catalonia.

### *Northern Italy*

Italy experienced large-scale immigration for the first time in the 1980s, in response to economic growth, demographic decline, and labour market restructuring (Gómez-Reino 2002: 117). Yet whilst legal immigrants comprise approximately 6% of Italy's population, the rate of illegal immigration into the country is reputed to have doubled this figure (Caritas 2006). Like Spain, Italy is often used as a port of entry, or stepping stone, by North African (and later, Eastern European)

migrants into the Schengen area of the EU. In response, Berlusconi's centre-right government sought to implement stricter control of illegal immigration on an EU-wide basis. Yet Berlusconi also sought, at the behest of the business community, to provide employers with the ability to hire illegal immigrants and then regularise the worker's status. This proposal was met with abject disapproval from the *Lega Nord*, which threatened to pull out of the centre-right coalition altogether unless the government took stricter measures on illegal immigration (Okoth 2003).

The Lega associates immigration with fear, crime, and a threat to its way of life (Cento Bull & Gilbert 2001; Gómez-Reino 2002; Zaslove 2004; McDonnell 2006). In particular, the Celtic, Christian, and Calvinist identity of Padania is supposedly threatened by an Italian immigration policy decided in Rome (Wagemann and Caramani 2005: 85). The party argues that the homogeneity of this ethnic community must be preserved by a stricter control of immigration and asylum claims. As well as using legislative means to achieve this goal – for instance supporting the 2002 immigration law that tightened repressive measures against illegal immigrants – the Lega has been engaged in populist rabble-rousing and demonstrations. For instance it organised a petition for a referendum to repeal the centre-left government's Turco-Napolitano law that regulated immigration and the status of foreigners (*La Repubblica*, 28 March 1998). According to the LN Provincial Secretary of Varese, 'The influx of *extracomunitari*<sup>3</sup> has caused more problems, such as theft, the use and sale of drugs and general petty crime. The 'black economy' gets bigger every day and the social cohesion of Varese and other towns is disintegrating. The LN wants to protect and maintain the traditional values, dialects and culture of these areas' (cited in Giordano 1999: 223).

More specifically, the Lega's immigration policy has been oriented towards the interests of the small business community in Northern Italy, which were 'threatened' by uncontrolled immigration (Allum and Diamanti 1996: 152). Surveys have revealed that Southern Italians and immigrants are considered as outsiders in these communities (Piore and Sabel 1984: 229). The Lega was able to successfully link the small business frustration with immigration and central government misrule to demands for regional autonomy (Cento Bull & Gilbert 2001). The Lega



argued that if Padania became independent, it could close its doors to immigration so that foreigners could not 'steal' local jobs. Whereas foreign 'others' were initially perceived to be Southern Italians, since 9/11 the immigrant 'other' has been those of the Islamic faith (McDonnell 2006). In 2002, the Lega was able to influence Italy's immigration policy through the introduction of the Bossi-Fini law. This law drastically reduced the number of immigrants allowed to enter Italy, linked employment with the granting of work permits and visas, reduced the possibilities for family reunification, and increased penalties for illegal entry (Zaslove 2004, 2006). This restrictive immigration policy was able to pass through government because of a pre-electoral pact between Bossi and Berlusconi. For although Berlusconi admitted that 'regulated, legal immigration would be good for Italy and its low birth rate' (Independent, 20 April 2000), Forza Italia have taken a stronger anti-immigrant stance since 2002. This culminated in the centre-right government's highly controversial move of putting 4,000 troops on the streets of Italy's main cities to clamp down on illegal immigration (*Repubblica*, 4 August 2008).

### **Homogenous versus Cosmopolitan Nation-Building**

From the previous discussion, it is clear that two contrasting regionalist party discourses have emerged regarding the composition of the nation in an integrating Europe: ethnic homogeneity versus multiculturalism and diversity, which has been described as 'cosmopolitanism' by some scholars (Guibernau 2006). What are the motivations that underlie these positions? We can identify five factors that have influenced regionalist parties' immigration policies: (1) a concern with cultural reproduction linked to the economy and labour market; (2) the ideological profile of the parties; (3) regional party competition; (4) statewide influences including central government policy and positioning on immigration; and finally (5) playing the European ideological game.

#### *Cultural Reproduction and the Labour Market*

An important aspect of nation-building strategies is socioeconomic policy and cultural reproduction (Keating 1996; De Winter & Türsan 1998). On the first matter regionalist parties have sought boost their economies to face the threats posed by depopulation, competition from foreign cultures and the opening of markets. Some regions are better positioned to face these challenges than others. Bavaria, Catalonia and Northern Italy are three of the wealthiest regions in Europe, but their responses to securing economic prosperity have varied. Whilst the LN and CSU have accused immigrants of stealing local jobs and placing pressure on the welfare state, the CiU has sought to provide fairer social security and housing benefits for newcomers. The oft-cited charge that the working class must compete with immigrant groups for scarce resources has been treated differently by parties. The SNP argues that skilled immigrant workers are necessary for the well-functioning of the economy, whilst the LN has sought to evict immigrant competitor workers from Padania's borders. Regionalist parties also seek different solutions to demographic change. Whilst the CiU and SNP view immigration as necessary to sustain their economies and public services and have encouraged newcomers to settle their families in Scotland and Catalonia, the CSU has a highly selective immigration policy, whilst the Lega argues that Italy should encourage only the return of those of Italian descent.

Cultural issues are closely linked to economic resources. Regionalist parties often mobilise on the need to protect local cultures to secure their survival in the face of globalisation (Keating and McGarry 2001). Parties such as the CSU and LN have demanded the creation of barriers to halt the inflow of immigrants into territorial communities, which are perceived as the source of 'dilution' of traditional cultures. This seems to corroborate Wagemann and Caramani's (2005) assertion that the tendency towards differentiation rather than assimilation of foreigners is indigenous to the Alpine region. But whilst these parties have sought to protect local cultures from newcomers, other regionalist parties have sought to normalise minority languages and cultures in order to assimilate immigrants into the nation. The CiU and SNP both advocate that immigration and multiculturalism can benefit the territorial project – through increasing the number of people claiming identification

with the nation. For instance, the CiU has encouraged the use of Catalan in everyday life and business in order to ensure its continued survival, and it actively encourages immigrants to use Catalan as their first language (Conversi 1997). Indeed, through its linguistic assimilation policies Catalonia has created policies a new generation of Catalan-speakers to struggle for recognition of their distinctiveness. Although, there are questions about the extent to which the CiU advocates the multicultural agenda, given that its policy of integration (assimilation) overrides any goal of celebrating cultural difference, on the part of immigrants, speaking Catalan is a way of sharing in the Catalan culture and identity, and acts as an incentive for immigrants to rise socially.

### *Party Ideology*

According to some scholars, the immigration policies of political parties may be categorised by their ideological profile. For instance, Jupp (2003) argues that the parties of the Left have historically favoured liberal, multicultural or cosmopolitan policies, whilst right-wing parties are seen to be more prone to anti-immigrant stances. This analysis corresponds with research done on the effect of the left-right construct on MEP immigration policy preferences and attitudes, whereby partisans of the Left are more likely to support increased immigration and immigrant rights than their colleagues on the Right (Lahav 2004: 133). But as this analysis has shown, parties themselves rarely fit into such neat categories. One case in point is CiU (centre-right) support for more immigration. More broadly, Zaslove (2006) has identified several reasons why class-based parties are often divided on immigration. On the left, he posits that there may exist a division between solidaristic, progressive policies and those fearing loss of traditional working class support base and jobs. On the right, the division lies between cultural conservatives fearful of the perceived threat that ethnic or cultural diversity poses, and economic conservatives with ties to business lobbies, which understand the benefits of immigrant labour for employers. Clearly, immigration cuts across the usual left-right ideological divisions in state and regional politics. Regionalist parties themselves are not easily mapped onto the left-right dimension (Hepburn 2009). In uniting the region under the

banner of autonomy, regionalist parties must present themselves as a broad ideological church to attract the greatest support. Territorial mobilisation as a general phenomenon cannot be associated with a single ideology – a party's ideological profile depends on its historical development, leadership, response to party competition and opportunity structures, and its ability to accommodate different ideological strands. Ideological and socioeconomic concerns are often secondary, then, to the goal of self-determination, which itself is often a matter of debate within parties.

### *Local Party Competition*

In constructing the territory, the competition that regionalist parties face in the local party system has an important shaping effect on their immigration policies. Most obviously, the immigration strategies of all parties, including regionalists, have been affected by the discourse of radical right anti-immigrant parties (Mudde 2007). The CSU is a case in point. With the rise of the *Republikaner* in Bavaria during the late 1980s, the CSU vowed that no party should ever exist to its right (Mintzel 1999). In other words, the CSU sought to include, rather than compete with, more extreme right-wing sentiment on issues such as immigration and European integration in order to maintain its monopoly over Bavarian politics. Yet there are other strategic reasons for pursuing a certain immigration policy, relating to the structure of the regional party system.

In Scotland, party competition since the 1960s has taken place on the left, caused by the gradual decline of the Conservatives and the rise of new social-democratic and socialist parties, including the SNP (Hepburn 2006). Labour, the SNP's main competitor, has supported increased levels of immigration to offset a declining population but the Westminster party has been more restrictive in response to concerns that immigration is flooding public services in (mainly South-East) England. The SNP has sought to distinguish itself from the opposition Scottish Labour party by criticising the 'Fresh Talent' initiative for its minimalist goals. It has also accused the Scottish party of failing to diverge from London Labour policies in order to secure Scotland's economic and demographic interests. In Bavaria, contrarily, party competition is on the right due to the CSU's

near continuous period in government since 1946. The CSU's tough stance on immigration and asylum, which was honed in response to, and as a way of undermining, the rise of the Republican Party in Bavaria, has met with criticism amongst opposition parties. Yet the SPD has been ineffective at challenging CSU dominance, and immigration debates continue to be shaped by the CSU 'party of state'.

### *Statewide Policy and Influences*

Not only are regionalist parties' immigration strategies influenced by regional party dynamics; they are also affected by broader statewide discourses, policies and media coverage. This often manifests itself in the form of opposition to government immigration policies and rhetoric, and the equation of this opposition with the defence of territorial interests. In Scotland and Catalonia, this has taken the form of criticising the central government's perceived restrictive immigration policy, and arguing the need for separate immigration policies in the regions to increase the workforce. Both parties have tried to position themselves as more democratic and progressive than the state government. Former SNP leader John Swinney accused the Blair government of being xenophobic with regard to immigration restrictions (*Sunday Herald*, 22 February 2004), whilst the CiU has criticised the Madrid government for its restrictive immigration policy that does not integrate foreigners. In Bavaria, the CSU has condemned the federal government for being lax about immigration, and not protecting the indigenous workforce, welfare state and culture from a perceived foreign onslaught. In all of these cases, regionalist parties have used immigration as a tool with which to criticise the central government for failing to protect substate territorial interests. As well as opposing government immigration policies in defence of territorial interests, party strategies may also include seeking to influence and even implement statewide policies if the regionalist party is elected to office at the state level. The Northern League was able to draft and shape the 2002 Bossi-Fini law on immigration, and even called for the resignation of one of their ruling coalition's ministers, as he was perceived to be too moderate on immigration (Okoth 2003). The statewide political arena

therefore acts as an important influential and opportunity structure for the articulation of regionalist parties' immigration policies.

### *Playing the European ideological game*

It has been argued that 'the European political arena has been open to regionalist movements that have emphasised territorial and inclusive nationalism and democracy, and not to those that cleave to ethnic exclusiveness or racism' (Keating 2006). To that end, Europe has encouraged regionalist parties to adopt civic and inclusive criteria for territorial membership (Lynch 1996). But whilst Europe may have been 'closed' to the ethnic-exclusive Lega Nord – which was expelled from the European Free Alliance – the CSU has avoided the need to 'de-ethnicise' its appeal as it categorises itself as a Christian conservative party. It has also been argued that regionalist parties are likely to advocate principles and themes common to those of the EU – such as support for free trade, diversity and a pro-integration outlook. Again, whilst the CiU and SNP seek to present themselves as avid Europeans (with the SNP advocating multiculturalism and the CiU welcoming the inclusion of immigrants), the Lega Nord – in rejecting diversity and the 'Europeanisation' of Padania, has been excluded from European networks. The CSU, which officially supporting the European principle of 'unity in diversity', rejects any moves towards multiculturalism.

This brings us to the question of how regionalist party support for European integration has related to their immigration goals. Some scholars have suggested that party positioning on, and public attitudes towards, these two issues is closely linked (Lahav 2004; de Vreese and Boomgaarden 2005; Diamanti & Bordignon 2005). On one hand it is evident that the SNP and CiU have adopted largely pro-European and pro-immigration policy goals, which have been broadly consistent since the deepening of integration. Both the SNP and CiU believe that European integration has served to bolster the development of regional identities. However, CSU and LN positioning on both issues has been more complex. The LN has changed its attitude towards Europe although its immigration stance has been relatively consistent. The party initially perceived Europe

as a support structure for strengthening Italian regionalism in the late 1980s, despite its anti-immigration stance sitting uneasily with support for further integration. As the Lega was criticised and excluded from European networks, it began to turn its back on Europe, strongly rejecting EMU, deeper integration and enlargement (Gómez-Reino 2002). The Bavarian CSU, in contrast, has consistently supported the principles of European integration, but the party has been less enthusiastic about the 'Europeanisation' of Bavaria, if that means Bavaria must open its society up to foreigners of different backgrounds, faiths and ethnicities. The CSU describes itself as a friendly critic of European integration, and has opted out of supporting certain European norms.

### **Conclusion: the Limits of Europeanisation**

This article has sought to demonstrate how immigration has become an important mobilising issue for regionalist parties. Whilst the issue of immigration is ordinarily associated with radical right parties (Betz 1994; Jupp 2003; Lahav 2004; Zaslove 2006; Mudde 2007), this research has shown that the regionalist party family has a different, but no less robust, stake in determining the barriers of citizenship and nationality. Immigration is intrinsically related to matters concerning the protection and advancement of regional identities and interests. However, as was shown, the manner in which regionalist parties mobilise on immigration, and link this to their territorial projects, varies significantly from country to country. Whilst some parties have welcomed immigration as a way of boosting their economies and expanding and diversifying national populations, other parties have rejected immigration as a threat to the labour market, and argue that it will undermine and fragment the national community. Rather than assume a homogenous response of regionalist parties to immigration, this discussion has sought to emphasise variation in parties' strategies to explain why some actors have become more Europeanised than others.

As we have seen, regionalist parties' immigration strategies have been largely informed by their constructions of the nation, which are often linked to their socioeconomic goals. The CiU and SNP both view immigration as necessary to support the economy, whilst the CSU and LN are more

concerned with labour market protection, and shielding the nation from foreign influences, which they claim is being hastened by Europe's openness to immigration. Moreover, the SNP and CiU have pursued largely pro-European positions, advancing more progressive policy agendas based on inclusion, multiculturalism and diversity. The CSU does not feel obligated to legitimise its approach to immigration, as it stakes its position on the basis of Christian conservatism rather than nationalism. Meanwhile, the LN seems to have foregone any desire to satisfy European expectations, and has turned to criticising Europe from afar.

Whilst all of the parties under analysis have, at various times, supported Europe as an outlet for regionalist aspirations, the goal of a Europe of the Regions or Peoples has been interpreted differently: for some parties it has represented cultural and ethnic diversity in Europe, whilst for others it has meant keeping Europe out of the nation. The heterogeneity in attitudes to Europe, and to Europeanising the nation, indicates that we are far from realising the 'cosmopolitan nationalism' that Guibernau (2006) argues for, which includes the 'right of any foreigner... to be treated without hostility in the country of arrival' which should go hand-in-hand with the eradication of 'the discrimination, repression and attempted annihilation suffered by some nations and ethnic groups'. So far, this goal remains a dream. Whilst some parties like the CiU and SNP have embraced multiculturalism as part of their constructions of the nation, the CSU and Lega Nord continue to espouse ethnically exclusive visions of the territory, and in turn reject diversity, and Europeanisation itself, as a threat to their traditional cultures. For these parties, an unresolved tension remains: having pursued autonomy strategies that argued for recognition of the diverse nations and peoples in Europe, not least their own, these parties unashamedly continue to oppose diversity within their own territorial borders.



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<sup>2</sup> Edmund Stoiber, leader of the CSU and Minister-President of Bavaria, maintains that Turkey, as a Muslim nation, should never be let into a 'club' of Christian nations (BBC News, 17 September 2002).

<sup>3</sup> *Extracomunitari* refer to those people who come from outside the EU.